

Discuss the function of personal ornaments of the head hunting tribes of Northern Luzon, Philippines

Southeast Asian Module – Post Graduate Diploma in Asian Art

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Fig 1. Bontoc warriors wearing the *fikum*, mother of pearl hip ornament, Northern Luzon, Philippines

In this essay, I will demonstrate ornaments that were used by Igorot people of indigenous mountain tribes from Northern Luzon, Philippines through selected ornaments that reflect past traditions of headhunting expeditions and personal beautification. I will be relating to parallel practices of the Naga tribe of Nagaland, Northeast India by reasons of strong resemblance and similarity of decorative adornments and rituals of headhunting and tattooing. I will expound on the use of ornaments as an enunciation of livelihood with symbolic, ritualistic and utilitarian purposes that are unique to the Cordillera region.

The Northern Luzon is within the Gran Cordillera Central of the Philippine Islands, it is a land locked region composed of mountain ranges, rice terraces and indigenous tribes collectively known as Igorot people. Igorot translates as mountain people, they practice wet rice agriculture and are known as forest dwellers that utilize nomadic hunting and gathering as a way of living. Out of the various tribes, I will examine the body ornaments of the Bontoc, Ifugao, Ilongot, Isneg, Gaddang and Kalinga tribes.

Figure 1 exemplifies youthful Igorot's wearing the *fikum* in a forest. The *fikum* shows that they are recognized as warrior headhunters of the *kadangyan* class. Figure 2 shows the detail of the *fikum*, a hip ornament, made of a large mother of pearl shell, seven diameters in size, the centre is a coconut disc with a fine cord of rattan going through the two holes that were drilled through, the rattan woven loops are then attached to a copper cord that coils around the waist as a belt. This is said to be for purely ornamental use during ceremonies, to be worn by *kadangyan* warrior headhunting males only. The *kadangyan* personifies the wealthy class within the social structure of the Igorot people.¹ The *kadangyan* demonstrates power, influence and ritual through the traditional crafts of the Igorot, as wealth is measured by possession of rice fields, heirloom objects and livestock. The *kadangyan* maintain their prestigious status through flamboyant display of body ornaments, head dresses and beads.² Also seen in figure 2 are etched edges with designs derived from local tattoo and textile patterns. Tattooing is a common indigenous ritual practice of beautification within the Indo-Pacific region. The etched design of the *fikum* is derived from the pattern of a tree fern, as the imagery of the tree fern is known to carry protection. The tree fern grows in a rapid speed thrusting upward, sprouting directly from the top of the trunk into a considerably large size. Tree fern tattoo designs are marked on the upper chest of warrior head hunting males after they have successfully hunted a head, as a sign of safety and success. Tattooing is done on the arms and shoulders of females for beautification, as seen in figure 3, and to express the progression of the stages in life.³ Tattooing traditions have completely faded; however, tattooing can be experienced by the public in present day from a commercial context in the village of Buscalan, Kalinga.



Fig 2 *Fikum*. Mother of pearl shell, 20 cm in diameters, central medallion of coconut shell, etched edges, tassel of beads. Bondoc, Northern Luzon, Philippines, early 20th century

¹ Anderson, Eric Moltzau, 2010. *In The Shape of Tradition* Pg. 170

² Odgers, Susan, 1985. *Power and Gold* Pg. 249

³ Casal, Father Gabriel, 1981 *The People and Art of the Philippines* Pg 193

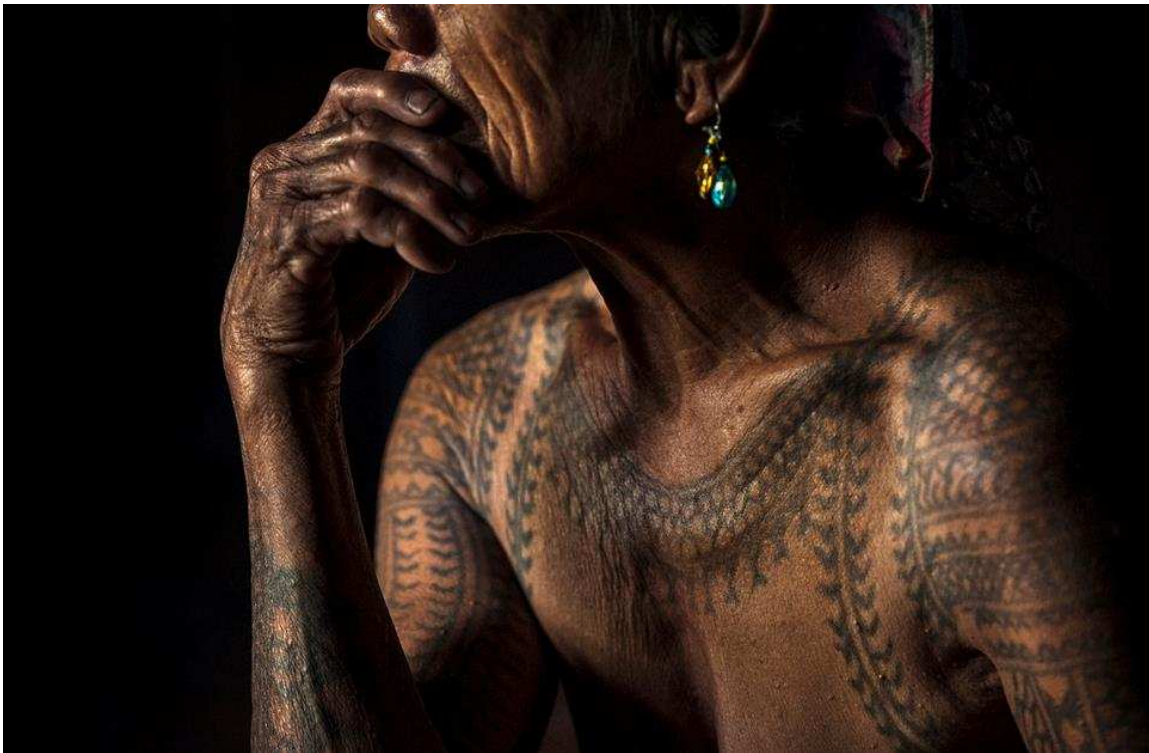


Fig 3 Elderly tattooed woman from Buscalan, Kalinga, Northern Luzon, Philippines, 2014

The last remaining traditional tattoo artist of Kalinga at age 95, is Whang-Od. She continues using the traditional methods of tattooing in the village of *Buscalan, Kalinga*, which has opened to the public market. The traditional method of tattooing is by using a thorn from a pomelo tree, a tapper made of bamboo and ink from the charcoal that collates at the bottom of the cooking pan. The bamboo is then hit with a piece of wood to mark the pattern onto the skin as shown in figure 4.



Fig 4 Whang Od giving a traditional tattoo to a local tourist, Buscalan, Kalinga, Northern Luzon, Philippines

Also seen in figure 4, Whang-Od wears a gold ear ornament known as the *ling-ling o*, a symbol of the female reproductive emblem, emphasizing the life giving qualities of females. The term *ling-ling o* is derived from the word *sing sing* meaning earring in the *Tagalog* dialect. There are common similarities of this symbolic figure shaped in the alphabet letter C, found in gold, silver, glass or copper throughout mainland Asia and the Indo-Pacific.⁴ Based on *Forms and Splendour*, a catalogue of Filipino ethnic ornaments, Roberto Maramba stated that “*Indonesian jewellery traditions offer a close parallel to the open oval shape of the Cordillera ling-ling o. Indonesian ethnic minorities such as the Batak of Sumatra, the Dayak of Borneo and the Toraja of Sulawesi, all share common traits and have similar material culture to Philippine ethnic minorities such as the Igorot of Northern Luzon.*” This demonstrates the carried metal was transported and traded within the Philippines from Indo China and South China, later to be made local.⁵



Fig 5 *Ling-Ling O* necklace, in brass on a twined cord.

The significance of tattooing is deeply associated with headhunting rituals. The motivation behind headhunting among primitive people would differ between each mountain tribe. It was known to be an act of excitement, as a showcase of agility and accuracy for warrior men, to right an injustice or to acquire the eligibility for marriage.⁶ The Ifugao believed that each family must take at least one head per year or they will suffer consequences of sickness, starvation or death.⁷ It was considered to be of duty and honour for the Bontocs, as the way of avenging death of a fellow tribesman was by taking a head from the offender's tribe.⁸ As the series of customs and motivations vary, the fundamental aspect of the matter is collectively, self-preservation.

An Igorot brave warrior goes to war with a spear, shield, head-axe and native knapsack. The rites for headhunting start with rituals to be observed prior to the expedition. One of which occurs on the Chico riverbank in Kalinga, where a fish is caught in the river and is roasted, then held by the warrior between his thumb and forefinger until a fly will arrive. It is considered to be a good omen if the fly lands on the thumb and a bad omen if it lands on the forefinger. These rites endow the warrior with fortitude to boost their morale. An alternative ritual is the *idchao* method, where a bird is used to determine the faith of the headhunting expedition. The *idchao* is a diminutive bird, and the omen is considered to

⁴ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, “*Form and Splendour*” Pg. 70

⁵ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, “*Form and Splendour*” Pg. 72

⁶ Cewed, Carmencita, 1972. “*The Culture of Bontoc Igorot*” Pg. 53

⁷ Worcester, Dean C. 1912 “*Head-hunters of Northern Luzon*” Pg. 849

⁸ Cewed, Carmencita, 1972. “*The Culture of Bontoc Igorot*” Pg. 20

be good if the bird crosses their path, perches itself on a branch and emits three shrill sounds. Any other behaviour is considered to be a bad omen, discontinuing the expedition until the improvement of signs.⁹ Every victory is then followed by a celebratory feast as the head is received with war cries and shouts of joy. Heads are buried underneath the houses of the men who have taken the head. Plates and relics are then placed over the spot where the heads are buried as offerings to evil spirits. The houses are then abandoned and their owners look forward to a period free from death and sickness.¹⁰ Today, the past tradition of headhunting has now been completely banned by law due to the influence and conversion to Christianity.



Fig 6 Naga warrior from the Konyak tribe, Nagaland, Northeast India, 2013

Headhunting and tattooing are past practices that are parallel with both the Igorot tribe and the Naga tribe. In Nagaland, headhunting was practiced within a religious context, with a sense of cultivating 'magic for fertility'. It was said that the best soul qualities are concentrated in the head, around the eyes and in the lower jaw. By taking the head of an opposing village, it is a means to gain the reserve of magical power from that individual. Social factors are involved, as only successful head-hunters are eligible for union in marriage and allowed to wear special ornaments as signs of distinction.¹¹ Among the Konyak Naga, the mark of a head hunter was tattooed on their face as seen in figure 6, they would have dotted curved multiple lines around their eyes. The face tattoo pattern is based on mithun horns. Mithun horns were cherished because of their attachment to the water buffalos; the Nagas had an affinity with animals in behalf of their prowess. Other forms of tattoos include stick men figures, lizards and ostrich shaped patterns. Tattooing

⁹ Cewed, Carmencita, 1972. *"The Culture of Bontoc Igorot"* Pg. 56

¹⁰ Worcester, Dean C. 1912 *"Head-hunters of Northern Luzon"* Pg. 849

¹¹ Stockhausen, Alban Von, 2014. *Imag(in)ing The Nagas* Pg. 341

was done by the females of the tribe, known as privilege of the queens. For females, tattoos were to distinguish clan membership, age groups or language groups.¹² The women desired men who are richly garnished in tattoos and ornaments, men who have surpassed adolescence and entered adulthood. Figure 7 and figure 8 are contemporary photographs of elderly men who bear witness to mortal combat and customary headhunting with their body markings on their face and chest. They are adorned in ornaments made of crocodile and wild boars teeth, correlative to that of the Igorot ornaments, the *tangkil* and *baoya* seen in figures 9-11. The commonalities between the Naga tribe and the Igorots is demonstrated by Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf in *Forgotten Kingdoms of Sumatra*, stating that “*The culture of the Naga tribes is recognized as representing an ancient form of megalithic complex so widely spread over South-eastern Asia, a form only found in a similar state of development on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.*”¹³



Fig 7 Elderly Konyak Naga warrior, Phongwang at age 84, wearing beaded ornaments, necklace of crocodile teeth on top of a backdrop of body and face tattoos, Nagaland, Northeast, India, 2014



Fig 8 Elderly Konyak Naga warrior, Pulei at age 95, wearing ornaments made of boars tusks attached to his headdress, covered in facial tattoos, Nagaland, Northeast, India, 2014

¹² Stockhausen, Alban Von, 2014. *Imag(in)ing The Nagas*” Pg. 395

¹³ Schnitger, F. M, 1939. *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*



Fig 9 Elderly *Kankanaey* man, Lakay Wa-aw, aged 92 wearing the *baoya* and the *tangki*, Sagada, Mountain Province, Northern Luzon, Philippines, 2014.



Fig 10 *Tangkil* arm ornament, boars tusks, rattan, wood, 20th c.



Fig 11 *Baoya*, 45cm, crocodile teeth wrapped in basketry, 20th c.

The *baoya* and the *tangkil* of the Bontoc tribe were worn by Bontoc warrior males and denoted headhunter status and success. These ornaments along with the *fikum* were considered to be luxury items of the *kadangyan* class. Crocodile teeth were the most prestigious material for ornaments. Throughout the Philippines, there is a regard for this reptile, it was said that crocodile teeth contain talismanic power, imparting magic to the wearer. The fearlessness and carnivorous ferocity was a metaphor for an ornament worn at head taking ceremonies. The *baoya* and the *tangkil* would be worn with a necklace of agate beads, also worn by female dancers as headbands along with long bright breechcloths and battle-axes.¹⁴ As seen in figure 10, joining the boar's tusks end to end creating a circle forms the *tangkil*, two holes are drilled near the tops of the tusks, allotting rattan cord to tie them together. This ornament is worn by the Ifugao, Bontoc and Kakanay on both arms above the elbow, as seen in figure 9. The tusks empowered the wearer with strength, speed, endurance and ferocity of a wild boar. The Bontoc headhunter created the vision of a half man and half animal. In full ceremonial dressing would be a rattan basket woven hat, *baoya*, *tangkil*, wooden shield and against a backdrop of tattooed skin. The Bontoc warrior would be seen dancing to the mesmerizing beat of the gong, embodying the mythic, supernatural creature that would take an enemy head and bring it back triumphantly to his village.¹⁵ Figure 9 shows a recent portrait photograph of an elderly Kankanaey man at age 92, Lakay Wa-aw, who still lives in the Sagada mountain province of Northern Luzon. Above him are two water buffalo horns from two of his children's weddings, he is wearing the *baoya* and *tangkil* that is centuries old and has been passed down from generation to generation. Figures 7-9 reveal the lost

¹⁴ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, "*Form and Splendour*" Pg. 58

¹⁵ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, "*Form and Splendour*" Pg. 78

traditions of indigenous tribes, yet continue to reverberate, through the inheritance and study of material culture from past generation onto the next.



Fig 12 *Batling*, 5in, hornbill beak, mother of pearl disks, 20th ce.



Fig 13 Ilongot male warrior wearing the *battling* and beaded neck ornaments

Figure 12 is a scarlet hornbill earring, *batling*, a primary piece of jewellery for the Ilongot male warrior, expressing masculine prestige and headhunting prowess. The *batling* earring ornaments marked the Ilongot headhunters, as only those who had taken heads had the right to wear the *batling*. It is approximately five inches long, the hornbill beak is cut in a jagged form with chains of tiny oval disks of mother of pearl attached with fine brass wire, worn suspended from the upper earlobe. The *batling* is in constant motion as light reflects from the pearl disks, comparing the motion to laughter, health and happiness as the warrior brings good fortune to the family. The shape of these earrings, in an acute angle characterizes the *upug*, an Ilongot term for beauty that is

forceful and intense. Acute angles are said to be seen in symmetrical designs on woven pouches, embroidered cloth, the skyward glances, the pose and concentration of a dancer with an arched back, bent knees and outstretched arms all embody *upug* with an aesthetic focus. The colour red of these earrings represents associations with youthful vitality possessed by warrior men. The Ilongot ideals of potency, health and beauty are woven in their ornaments and dances. As they have been blessed with sacrificial blood, they possess potency of protection.¹⁶

The heroism of males was harmonized by the natural vitality of the female spirit. The most decorative beadwork is worked in characteristic colours of red, yellow, white and black – carrying the notion of the cosmos, of which the upper and lower worlds of male and female are in a state of symmetry, as seen in figures 14 and 15.¹⁷

¹⁶ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, “*Form and Splendour*” Pg. 165

¹⁷ Richter, Anne. 2000 “*The Jewellery of Southeast Asia.*” Pg. 245

The most striking ethnic ornament is the *sipattal* of the Isneg tribe. The *sipattal* is made of carved butterfly shaped mother of pearl shell, red, black and blue glass beading and incised fringe edges that hang in a repetitive pattern, worn suspended on the chest along with a string of beads on the head. The Isneg tribe live in isolation, within the wild mountains of Apayao, once known as the most dedicated headhunters of the Cordillera region. The Isneg tribe hunted heads for animistic purposes, religion, prestige and qualification for marriage. As the military courts established themselves, the practice was eliminated. The Isneg valued plates, bowls, blankets and



Fig 14 *Sipattal*, neck ornament, mother of pearl, glass beads, rattan, Northern Luzon, Philippines, 20th ce.

beads, possessions that constitute traditional wealth.¹⁸ The *sipattal* necklace was used for special ceremonies or marriage, as part of the dowry of the family. The *sipattal* is also given to sons as a gift given by the male to the parent of the female as compensation for their care of their daughters and their loss of her services to the family. This shimmering shell display makes it distinctive of Northern Luzon.¹⁹ Figure 16 shows the wealth of Isneg ornaments as the female is decked in head bands of glass, ceramic



Fig 15 *Pawisak*, ear ornaments, mother of pearl, glass beads, rattan, Northern Luzon, Philippines, 20th ce.

and seeds, beaded necklaces and two pairs of *sipattal*.

Displayed in figure 15 is a *pawisak*, mother of pearl shell cut into a clover leaf shape, with small woven beads in red, yellow, blue, black and white, to serve as a sling over the ear. Shell was traded with lowlanders living within coastal communities; large giant clam pieces were treasured by the Cordillera highlands. These ear ornaments are worn with strands of agate beads across the chest as seen in figure 17. More than any ornament,

¹⁸ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, "Form and Splendour" Pg. 175

¹⁹ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, "Form and Splendour" Pg. 184

beads held great importance within Kalinga society strata. Along with jars and rice fields, beads were highly esteemed heirloom objects. In the line of inheritance, it was among the females where beads, gold earrings and house sites would traditionally be passed down. Rice fields, livestock, poultry, gold bracelets and antique bowls would be passed onto males or females. The name Kalinga is a collective name coined during the Spanish times for all mountain people inhabiting the Cagayan Valley of Malay and Negrito (unmixed Filipino blood) origin. The Kalinga tribe is known as the peacock of the Philippines, because of their spectacular adornments and vibrant costume. The Kalinga is recognized for their heavy jewellery, turban headdresses, feather and flower ornaments. During festivities, the Kalinga's would have ornaments of scarlet feathers of bright yellow attached by bits of beeswax, as well as hibiscus flowers and marigolds in their hair.²⁰ Armlets, necklaces and hair pieces are their only ornaments against their skin of elaborate tattooing. To complement their elegant costume, their body form is known to be one of the finest in the Philippines, with a strong bone and muscle structure, high cheekbones and eyes set apart. The word Kalinga is translated to enemy, applying to the people of a sharply marked warlike tribe; once a strong headhunting group has slowly become less hostile and more integrated into society, yet keeping their sense of tribal awareness due to their dialect and peace pact.²¹



Fig 16 Portrait of an Isneg female, she wears head beads of glass, ceramic and seeds, two sets of *sipattal* neck ornament, Mount Apayao, Northern Luzon, Philippines



Fig 17 Kalinga female dancing at a prestigious feast, she wears *pawisak* earrings and beaded necklaces, Kalinga, Northern Luzon, Philippines

²⁰ Worcester, Dean C. 1912 *"Head-hunters of Northern Luzon"* Pg. 873

²¹ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, *"Form and Splendour"* Pg. 190

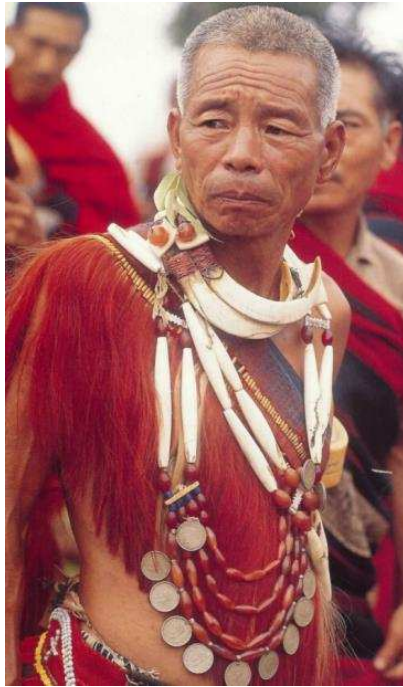


Fig 18 Portrait of a male man from the Konyak Naga tribe of Nagaland, Northeast, India



Fig 19 Portrait of a female from the Konyak Naga tribe of Nagaland, Northeast, India

Figure 19 and 20 are portraits of the Konyak Naga tribe displaying their ornaments at a celebratory festival. Figure 19 shows a male wearing a shell neck ornament with red carnelian beads, agate beads and coins, a conch shell would be attached to the necklace and it would hang on his back; he also wears a neck ornament made of the bone of a sacrificial animal. Figure 20 shows a female wearing red glass beads, brass, and a glass c-shaped earring. There is a strong resemblance in material of shell and beads, aesthetic, form and function of ornaments with the Igorot tribes of Northern Luzon. The conch and other forms of shell were commonly used by the Nagas, because of its derivation from the seaway; they believed that its white pristine body retained the alchemy of water, correlating to fertility. Shell would have been traded from coastal regions of the lower lands. They adorned the colour red, associating it with power and abundance, carnelian and deep red glass beads were honoured by the Nagas. In Figure 19, the female wears glass earrings similar to that of figure 4 and 5, the *ling-ling o*, a c-shaped earring that was widespread across Southeast Asia.

In Southeast Asia, the tropical climate would cause organic materials to quickly rot, such as seed and wood, while durable stone and glass were considered sources of strength, durability and longevity.²² As beads have always been significant to dress and ritual of ethnic indigenous communities within the Philippines; while the highlanders had the

²² Dublin, Lois, 1987. "History of Beads" Pg. 229

greatest variety of beads, the lowlanders had the most elaborate beadwork.²³ The Kalinga's preferred glass beads in red, yellow, black and white, particularly agates and carnelian. In a life of a Kalinga, beads would accompany them from birth until death. Beads were most prominent during festivities and headhunting celebrations. As a way of displaying family wealth, as seen in the portrait of a Kalinga female in figure 20, these relics held long histories and strong reputations. Kalinga women would wear multiple strands of beads with tattoos adorning her arms and shoulders. Kalinga healers would place carnelian beads beside the sick whilst reciting incantations over them; they believed that beads retained curative powers. Men wore beads as ritualistic adornment to proclaim their capacity as warriors and headhunters, marking the transformation of adolescence into adulthood; a man who is proud, distinctive and fearless. Among the Gaddang tribe, beads were an important component of religion, as well as means of exchange and material wealth. Beads were believed to possess the potency to protect and held the value of currency; it retained an aesthetic, spiritual, social and economic purpose.²⁴



In conclusion, ornaments of past traditions of headhunting successions, body tattooing, personal beautification and precious beads of the Igorot indigenous tribes of Northern Luzon, as an ethnic expression of culture within the Cordillera region is a precedent of Filipino artistry. As a response to its integrity of design and talismanic potency and as seen in the bearings of ritual, music and dance, the wearer elevates the use of ornaments as a form deeply rooted within the earth and mountains and brought into life through creation and material.

Fig 20 The wife of a Kalinga chief, adorned in beaded neck ornaments, Northern Luzon, Philippines

²³ Dublin, Lois, 1987. *"History of Beads"* Pg. 242

²⁴ Maramba, Roberto. 1998, *"Form and Splendour"* Pg. 208

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Illustrations:

Fig 1. Bontoc warriors wearing the *fikum*, mother of pearl hip ornament, Northern Luzon, Philippines

http://www.collectorsdeck.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=303

Fig 2 *Fikum*. Mother of pearl shell, 20 cm in diameters, central medallion of coconut shell, etched edges, tassel of beads. Bondoc, Northern Luzon, Philippines, early 20th century

Maramba, Roberto. 1998, *“Form and Splendour: Personal Adornments of Northern Luzon Ethnic Groups of the Philippines.”*

Fig 3 Elderly tattooed woman from Buscalan, Kalinga, Northern Luzon, Philippines, 2014

<http://www.photoburst.net/travel-photography/2014/10/kalinga-philippines-tattoo-woman-batek-nikon-d700-nikkor-70-200mm-jacob-maentz/#.VWXltUb9miw>

Fig 4 Whand Od giving a traditional tattoo to a local tourist from Manila, Philippines

<http://www.jacobimages.com/2013/05/igorots-cordilleras>

Fig 5 *Ling-Ling O* necklace, in brass on a twined cord.

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Fig 6 Naga warrior from the Konyak tribe, Nagaland, Northeast India, 2013

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ronnyreportage/sets/72157633105298822>

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<http://feeds2.feedburner.com/JacobMaentzsBlog>

Fig 10 *Tangkil* arm ornament, boars tusks, rattan, wood, 20th c.

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Fig 11 *Baoya*, 45cm, crocodile teeth wrapped in basketry, 20th c.

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Private Collection, Lesley Pullen, 2015

Fig 13 Ilongot male warrior wearing the *battling* and beaded neck ornaments

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Fig 17 Kalinga female dancing at a prestigious feast, she wears *pawisak* earrings, beaded necklaces, Kalinga, Northern Luzon, Philippines

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Fig 20 The wife of a Kalinga chief, adorned in beaded neck ornaments, Northern Luzon, Philippines

<http://www.natgeocreative.com/photography/charlesmartin>

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